

2013

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Recommended Citation

Spencer, Barbara J. (2013) "The Moral Imperative Realized [review] / Fullan, Michael," *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*: Vol. 7: No. 1, 118-119.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/jacl/vol7/iss1/14>

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THE MORAL IMPERATIVE REALIZED

By Michael Fullan
 Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin (2011)
 Paperback, 96 pages

Reviewed by BARBARA J. SPENCER

The Moral Imperative Realized urges readers to hold morality at the center of any change process. Although the context of Fullan's discussion is public education, this book has important implications for many in the non-profit sector and helping professions. Nurses, pastors, and other hospital and church leaders are among those who will be enriched by this discussion.

The "moral imperative" in the title is a balanced strategy and long range vision with implementation and daily commitment. Regardless of the field or the level of leadership involved, social responsibility is at the heart of successful reform. To achieve sustainable change, an organization's stakeholders must identify with the success of the organization and develop a mutual identity, understanding their individual roles and committing to a higher (moral) purpose.

Successful reform leaders must have several characteristics: informed optimism, persistence, the willingness to confront behavior that is incongruent with moral purpose, and the ability to help others uncover their own moral purposes. Informed optimism and confident efficacy are fused qualities that combine to create resolute moral purpose and a high level of persistence. Effective leaders move forward even when things seem to be stagnant, or worse, falling apart.

No matter how skilled, leaders cannot move forward in isolation. Effective relationship building is a

crucial leadership competency. As Fullan points out, "if you want to challenge someone to do better, you'd better build a relationship first" (p. 6). Gone are the days when leaders were desk-bound problem solvers. Today's leaders are in the hallways, the classrooms, the library and the cafeteria, in the middle of the daily ebb and flow of organizational life. Furthermore, they have a moral obligation to collaborate with and learn from other organizations.

The educational case studies featured in the book all highlight the same phenomenon: even the smallest successes fuel the change process. Once organizations begin achieving, more and more people climb aboard, even some of the most cynical. Moral purpose is created where it did not previously exist. One of the reasons collective success is so energizing is that it is not only inspiring, but educative as well. Once employees discover or regain their moral purpose, they become change agents, thus creating a ripple effect. The catalyst for this level of change is always a leader, formal or informal, who has embraced the moral imperative.

For whole system leaders, "the moral pie gets bigger" (p. 58). This level of leadership requires a broadened perspective that transcends the tools of personal influence and competency. Leaders at this level must use the tools of policy and strategy creation if they want to cultivate an environment that will reap successful and sustainable change. In order to do this, though, they must also find a way to stay grounded in the reality of the organization.

Some readers may feel that the topic of morality and the change process is too broad to be located in a single context like educational reform. However, by using a single context, Fullan underscores the point

that change and morality are mutually dependent in all situations. Regardless of context, change without morality is unsustainable, and morality that does not result in change is hollow. In Fullan's words, "it is time to marry purpose and action. . . . The only thing that counts at the end of the day is moral purpose realized" (p. 76). Leaders and helpers in all fields would be wise to remember this message.

BARBARA J. SPENCER is a doctoral candidate at Andrews University.

EMPOWERING LAITY, ENGAGING LEADERS: TAPPING THE ROOT FOR MINISTRY

*By Susan E. Gillies and
M. Ingrid Dvirnak
Valley Forge, PA, Judson Press (2012)
Paperback, 140 pages*

Reviewed by DAVID PENNO

Empowering Laity, Engaging Leaders is the third volume of the *Living Church* series edited by J. Dwight Stinnett. The goal of the series is to address eight key dynamics that are devastating the Christian church today, so that congregational leaders are empowered to address these negative forces. Gillies and Dvirnak are responding to the "declining leadership base" (p. viii) with which many churches are struggling.

The authors identify the root cause of the decline in non-clergy leaders in the Christian church today as disillusionment, which leads to disengagement. They identify three causes of this disillusionment: the misalignment of purpose and structure, individual resistance, and the misuse of

leaders. To function effectively as the Body of Christ, all three must be addressed. Church leaders will not endure the tension when the organizational demands on them do not fit with the mission of the church. Serving as a leader in the church must be about serving people, not maintaining an organization. The resistance of unchurched or "dechurched" people makes serving the church less appealing to many leaders. And those who are overworked or not working in their area of giftedness soon burn out and quit.

Gillies and Dvirnak use Jesus as a model for genuine leaders in the church today. Humility, assurance of God's calling, good communication skills, and focusing on the potential of those we serve are all aspects of effective leadership in the church. The focus on potential includes helping members discover their spiritual gifts and mobilizing them while investing in the areas where they are strong. This opens the way for God to work mightily through his people. Spiritual maturity is also a key mark of good leaders. "Spiritually unhealthy leaders endanger the congregation" (p. 91), while those who are mature are a great blessing.

One of the interesting suggestions about caring for leaders is the idea of rotating leaders. Rather than leaving people in the same position for year after year, the authors suggest that every three years or so members could change the leadership position in which they serve. This allows them to be challenged to grow into new areas of service, and it opens up opportunities for others to serve in the place they have vacated. They also suggest that the church should help leaders do periodic self-assessment so that they continue to grow in their proficiency as leaders.

The book also encourages church